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**GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF KHULNA CITY: AN ANALYTICAL
REVIEW**

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Abstract: Khulna is a growing metropolis and the third largest city of Bangladesh. It is a port city and an important industrial town of the country. The present growth and development trend of Khulna city is phenomenal. Though Khulna city has a short and decent past history, its growth potential was never as prominent as it is now a days. Unlike Dhaka, Chittagong, and Rajshahi city, Khulna does not possess a long historical growth record. Khulna is the third municipality in the southwestern region of Bangladesh, and previously it was a subdivision headquarters under Jessore district. But in the later part of British regime, the growth of Khulna city was rapid and it surpassed the growth of other cities in this region. This growth was more rapid after the partition of India, especially after the emergence of Bangladesh. This paper provides a short description of the growth of Khulna city in different periods, and investigates the underlying causes of its growth and development. A number of reasons were identified for the spectacular growth of the city. It is found that during British Period, colonial administrative decisions and the growing importance of maritime trade and revenue collection led to the growth and development of this town. In later periods, some other factors like the partition of India, establishment of divisional headquarters in the city, independence of Bangladesh, setting up of *Mongla* Port, and shrimp cultivation in Khulna Region greatly enhanced the growth of this metropolis.

Key words: Khulna; Growth; Development; Settlement; Industrialization

Introduction

Khulna city is now the third largest metropolis of Bangladesh. Located in the South West corner of the country, the city has its own heritage and legacy. It was originated during the Mughal Period as a trading center in the junction between the *Rupsha* and *Vairab* River (Islam, 1991). The city flourished on the trading and distribution activities of the products from the *Sunderban*'s mangrove forest like fuel wood, honey, *golpata*, and salt (Islam, 1982). Present day Khulna city started as a subdivision of Jessore district in 1842, and became a district headquarters in 1882, and the third municipality in the region in 1884 (Samsuddin, 1986). Later it was connected by rail and road to other parts of the Indian sub-continent including Calcutta city. After the partition of India in 1947, communication links of the city with Calcutta were disrupted, and the city temporarily lost momentum in its tempo of development. However, the establishment of *Chalna* sea port in the 1950's once again provided the city the desired pace (Islam, 1991). However,

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the establishment of the divisional headquarter in the city in the 1960's initiated the real phase of development and industrialization for the metropolis. For the planned development of the city, Khulna Development Authority was set up in 1961, and in 1984 Khulna city was upgraded to the status of a city corporation.

Methodology

This paper is based on a literature review of secondary sources. A previous paper by the three authors entitled "Problems and Prospects of Development in Metropolitan Khulna: An Analytical Discussion" was an important documentary basis for this paper. Other relevant documents including books, reports and monographs were consulted to draw findings and deduce conclusions. Based on the literature review, this paper now provides an account of the growth and development of the city in different periods and tries to investigate the underlying causes.

Origin of the City

Khulna is not a very old settlement. It is situated on the southern part of the Gangetic delta. Khulna was a part of the island *Burani* which was developed on the estuary of *Haldighi*, a branch of the Ganges. It was the last tract of alluvial plain at that time, when the *Sundarbans* covered most of this region. Very little is known about Khulna in early periods. It was then a small settlement, and there was no existence of the *Rupsha* River. The *Rupsha* was a small canal only navigable by riverboats (Mitra, 1963). Boats carrying different commodities like wood, honey, and salt from the *Sundarbans* used to halt at Khulna, a small trade center at that time. Many rumors are in vogue regarding the nomenclature of Khulna city. The most reliable of these is that this settlement was named after a Hindu temple, *Khullaneswari*, dedicated to the goddess *Kali* of Hindu mythology. The temple was situated on the bank of the river *Bhairab*, at Talimpur, about a mile east to the present city of Khulna. The old temple *Khullaneswari* no longer exists. A new temple was built at the site in 1880, after the old temple was washed away by river erosion (Samsuddin, 1986).

The original site of Khulna was said to have situated at Kapilmuni, 37 miles away from the present city of Khulna. Here, there is a canal called *Khullana Khal*, and a bridge named *Khulna Bridge*. Description about Khulna is found in different books and records. A recorded description of the existence of Khulna is found in the logbook of the sunken ship *Falmouth*. In it, Khulna is described as *Culnea*. In old maps, Khulna is described as *Jessore Culnea* (Rennell, 1793).

Khulna during Pre-Mughal Period (Before 1600 AD)

Very little is known about Khulna during pre-Mughal Period. In *Gupta* Period, especially during the reign of Samudra Gupta (340-380 AD), Khulna was under the Gupta empire. Khulna came under the authority of Sasanka, the ruler of *Gaur* (the old capital of Bengal) in the beginning of the 7th century AD King Rampal of Pal dynasty reigned in this region from 1085 AD and Khulna was included within his kingdom (Islam, 1991). Ikhtiar Uddin Muhammad Bakhtiar Khalji, the courageous Turkish soldier conquered *Gaur* the capital

of Bengal in 1205 AD, and the Hindu king of Bengal, Lakkhan Sen fled to Nabadeep. After the death of Lakkhan Sen, his son Biswarup Sen and Keshab Sen ruled the southern region of Bengal including Khulna till 1223 AD. At that period, Khulna was almost completely a Hindu dominated area.

Sultan Shamsuddin Firoz Shah (1310-1325 AD) of *Gaur* was one of the first Muslim rulers to conquer this region. Muslim settlements started expanding during the reign of Shamsuddin Ilias Shah (1342-1352 AD). During the reign of Muslim rulers, this region was often known as *Khalifatabad* (Mitra, 1963). It was then ruled by a Muslim Governor named Khan Jahan Ali (1419-1459 AD), who was generally known as *Khanja Ali*. Khan Jahan Ali was a ruler as well as a saint. He came to this region in the early period of the 15th century to reclaim and cultivate the *Sundarbans* and to preach Islam. He marched through Khulna with 6000 followers to Bagerhat where he finally settled. The Khan Jahan Ali road of present day Khulna city bears the testimony of the saint's long march to Bagerhat (Mitra, 1963).

Khulna during Mughal Period (1608-1764 AD)

Till the end of the 16th century, the Mughals could not exercise their authority in this region as this tract of land was ruled by the mighty king Pratapaditya of the *Bara Bhuiyas* (the twelve chiefs of Bengal). After the conquest of Bengal by the Mughals in 1576 AD, king Bikramaditya and Basanta Rai submitted to the Mughal authority, and they were allowed to retain their territory, which was granted to them by Daud Khan Karrani, the then Mughal ruler of Jessore. During Mughal regime, the areas under its jurisdiction were divided into several *parganas*, *mahallas* and *kismats* for ease of revenue collection. The term *kismat* was attached to several areas, and *Kismat Khulna*, *Kismat Dumuria*, *Kismat Phultala* was widely known. The area and population of Khulna in the Mughal period is not exactly known, but it is assumed that its population and area gradually expanded after the Mughal Period (Samsuddin, 1986).

Khulna during British Period (1764-1947 AD)

The *East India Company* of Britain obtained the *diwani* or fiscal administrative power of Bengal in 1765, and with that started the British rule in Khulna. Since then, Khulna has gradually expanded in area and population. We also find a distinct and well-documented history of Khulna in British Period. Previously, Khulna was a medium sized village on the opposite side of the *Rupsha* canal beside the *Bhairab* River. After the arrival of the British rulers, Khulna started expanding at a steady pace. Khulna was badly affected by the "*great famine of 1772*". Many people of Bengal and other parts of India died due to this famine, and Khulna lost a significant proportion of its inhabitants (Fawcus, 1927).

In 1781, *East India Company* set up an administrative center at *Murali*, of Jessore and appointed Mr. Tilman Henckley as its magistrate. The main office of the salt agency of this company was shifted from Jessore to Kaliganj of Khulna. In the same year, Khulna was upgraded to a *Thana*. It was mainly due to its growing importance in maritime trade and administrative functionary. Soon the British indigo planters started settling in Khulna. These indigo planters acquired considerable landed property in this region, and

gained enormous power. They forced the Bengali farmers to cultivate indigo instead of rice, the staple food of the people of Bengal. Mr. Enderson at Daulatpur established the first indigo center of Khulna in 1801. Mr. Charles at Khalishpur set up another indigo center in 1802. Within a short period, Khulna became an important center for indigo cultivation and trade in Bengal. In 1836, a new Thana was established organizing the old Khulna Thana, which was named *Nayabad Thana* (Mitra, 1963)

In 1842, Khulna subdivision was formed which included parts of Jessore district and some parts of the district of *24 Parganas*. Till 1882, Khulna was a part of Jessore district. Khulna was upgraded to a district on the 25th April of 1882. The new district consisted of the sub-division of Satkhira, Bagerhat and some parts of the present Khulna division and its headquarters was made the town of Khulna. In 1884, Khulna became a municipality and it was then the third municipality of the southwestern region. At that time, the area within the municipal limits was 4.64 square miles (Huda, 1985). No population census was done till 1880 and the population of Khulna was recorded 7,563 in 1881. The town of Khulna in 1884 comprised of the villages of Khulna, Koylaghata, Helatala, Baniakhamar, Tootpara, Shibbari and Choto Boyra (GOB, 1978). The growth of the town, however, was steady and concentrated around barabazar area. A number of ferry terminals developed in different places on the riverfront for transshipment of material and people. People travelling by train from Bagerhat to Calcutta and other places used to cross the *Rupsha* by a ferry. Human settlements also developed encircling these ferry terminals. The European settlers lived in separate sections of the city, near the administrative and commercial arena. The churches and cemeteries of the city testify to the legacy of the colonial past of Khulna (Islam, 1991).

The area and population of Khulna town increased gradually in British period, and in 1947, the last year of British regime, Khulna was a small town under the division of *Presidency*. However, till the partition of India, it was a Hindu dominated area.

Khulna during Pakistan Period (1947-1971 AD)

After the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947, two countries: Pakistan and India emerged and Khulna remained in the eastern part of Pakistan. The role and importance of Khulna city in East Pakistan gradually increased. In October 1961, Khulna division was formed, and Khulna city became its headquarters. The municipal area of Khulna city also expanded. In 1961, its area became 14.30 square miles and its population grew to 2,29,199 (BBS, 1972). Before the partition of India, all trade links of East Bengal with the outside world was mainly through Calcutta Port. This trade link broke down after the partition of India, and there rose the acute necessity of a seaport for the southern part of East Pakistan. The then Government set up a seaport at Chalna, on the bank of the river Pashur, which was very near to Khulna city. With the silting of the Pashur River, this port was moved to a nearby site *Mongla*, with a deep-water channel. A number of industrial establishments namely jute, match and paper developed in *Daulatpur* and *Khalishpur* areas of Khulna city. Khulna Development Authority (KDA) was set up for a planned development of the city and it had an area of 70 square miles within its jurisdiction. Infrastructure, and administrative facilities of Khulna city were developed gradually and Khulna became the third industrial town of East Pakistan only after Dhaka and Chittagong.

Khulna during Bangladesh Period (1971 Onwards)

After the independence of Bangladesh, the population pressure on Khulna started increasing and the physical expansion of Khulna was also fast. In Khalishpur area beside the *Bhairab* River, new industries started growing rapidly. A number of new development works were undertaken. Khulna Development Authority developed new residential neighborhoods (e.g. *Nirala*, and *Sonadanga*) in the city. In December 1984, Khulna Municipality was upgraded to Khulna Municipal Corporation and later; its name was changed to Khulna city Corporation. A Mayor now heads the present city Corporation of Khulna, and the city is one of the four metropolitan cities of Bangladesh. The municipal limits of the city were also expanded comprising of 31 wards and an area of 37.27 square kilometers (Rahman, 1996).

At present, Khulna is the main center for trade and commerce in the southwestern Region of Bangladesh. Khulna is equally important for internal trade and overseas trade. Exportable bulk items of Bangladesh such as raw jute, jute products, hides and skins are generally exported through Khulna via *Mongla* Port. Similarly, several importable bulk commodities like rice, wheat, raw cotton, coal, cement, and yarn are imported to Bangladesh through Khulna via *Mongla* Port (Hasan, 1998). In internal trade, Khulna holds an important position in the country. Products of the southern region of the country e.g. date sugar, saline water fish, rice, timber, and wood are mainly distributed to other parts of the country through Khulna city. Khulna is one of the most important trading centers for shrimp, frozen fish, brackish water fish, and crab. More than half of the total amount of exportable shrimps, crabs and marine fishes are produced in the greater district of Khulna.

Table 1. Contemporary population data for Khulna city corporation and Khulna metropolitan area.

Year	Khulna city Corporation	Khulna Metropolitan Area
1961	80,220	1,27,990
1974	4,37,300	4,67,960
1981	5,61,960	6,52,000
1991	6,63,340	9,21,360
1998	8,47,580	11,77,160
2020 (predicted)	20,53,473	32,58,027

Source: Structure Plan for Khulna, 1998.

An Analysis of the Growth and Development of Khulna city in Different Periods

During the early years of British regime, Jessore was more important than Khulna. The *Sundarbans* then covered most part of the southern belt of Khulna. As people started clearing the *Sundarbans*, they also started settling in different areas of this region. Gradually the untapped resources became open to the traders and businessmen. Salt and sugar manufacturing was an age-old occupation in this region. As found earlier, the *East India Company* was involved in salt, sugar and indigo trading. At that time, the major portion of salt was produced in Khulna region, and it was very difficult for the *East India Company* to look after this salt trading from Jessore. As mentioned earlier, the then *East India Company* shifted their main office of salt trading from Jessore to Kailaghata in Khulna in 1731. In indigo cultivation and trading, Khulna was also a prominent center. Due to the growing importance in maritime trade and administrative functionalities, the first Thana was established in Khulna in 1781. Thus the growing importance in trade and commerce in the early period of British rule helped the growth and development of the city.

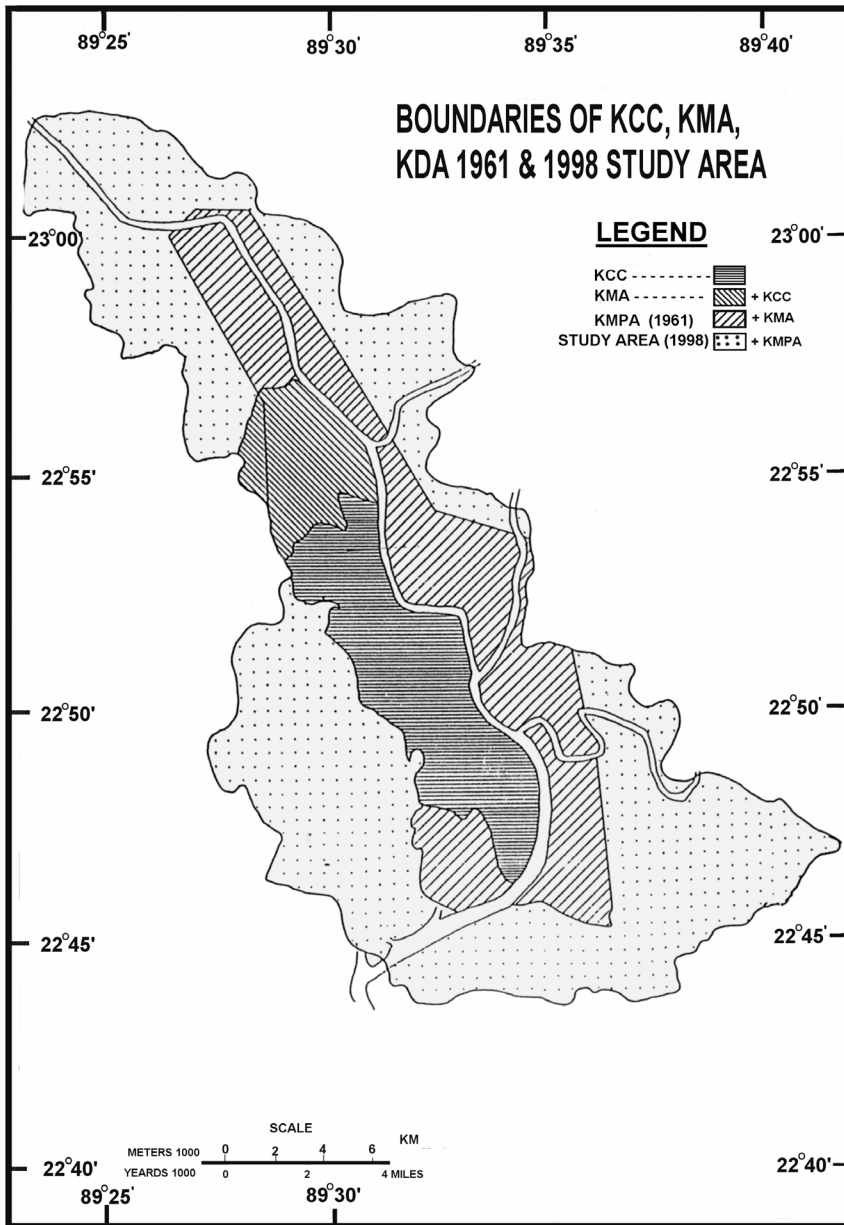
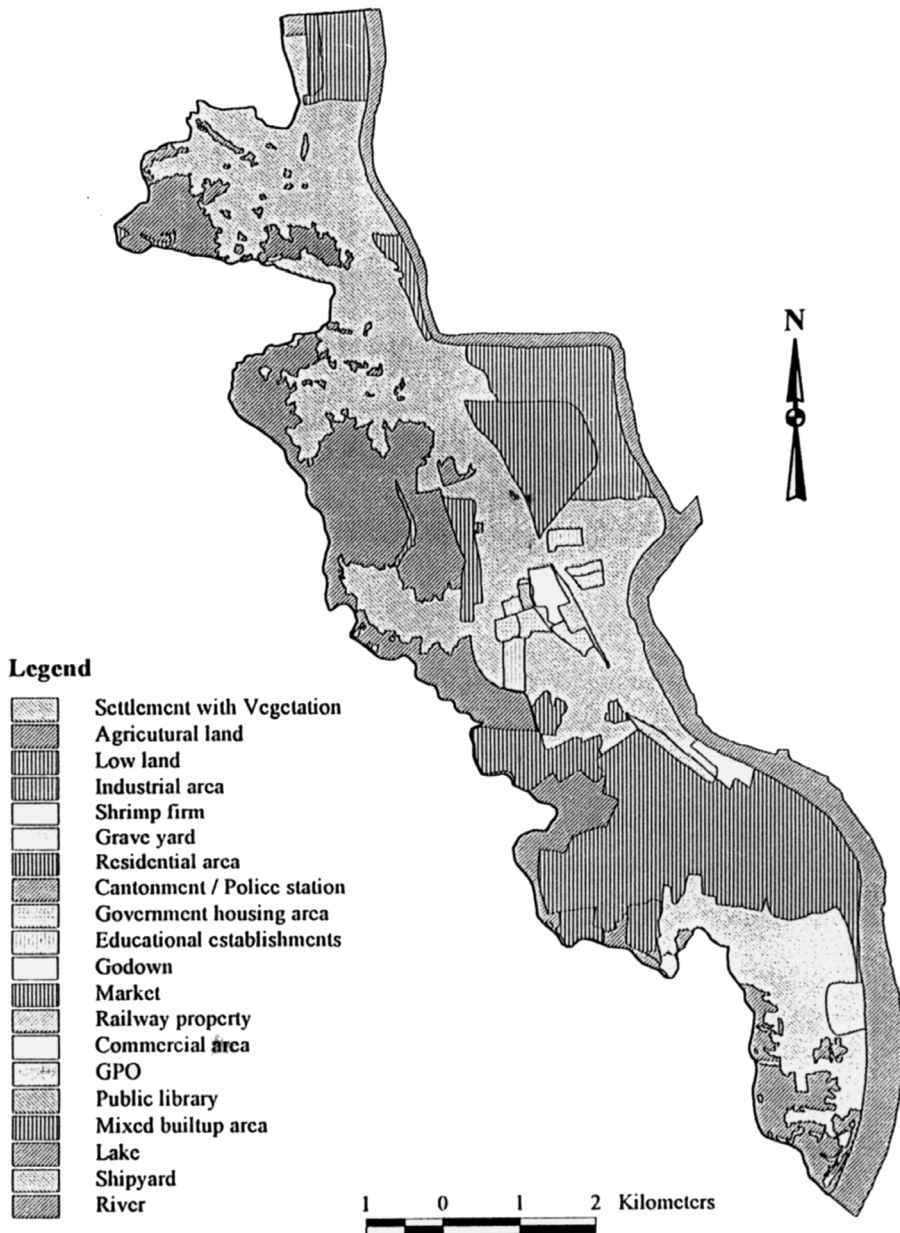


Fig. 1. Different boundaries for Khulna city region.

Land Use Map of Khulna City Corporation



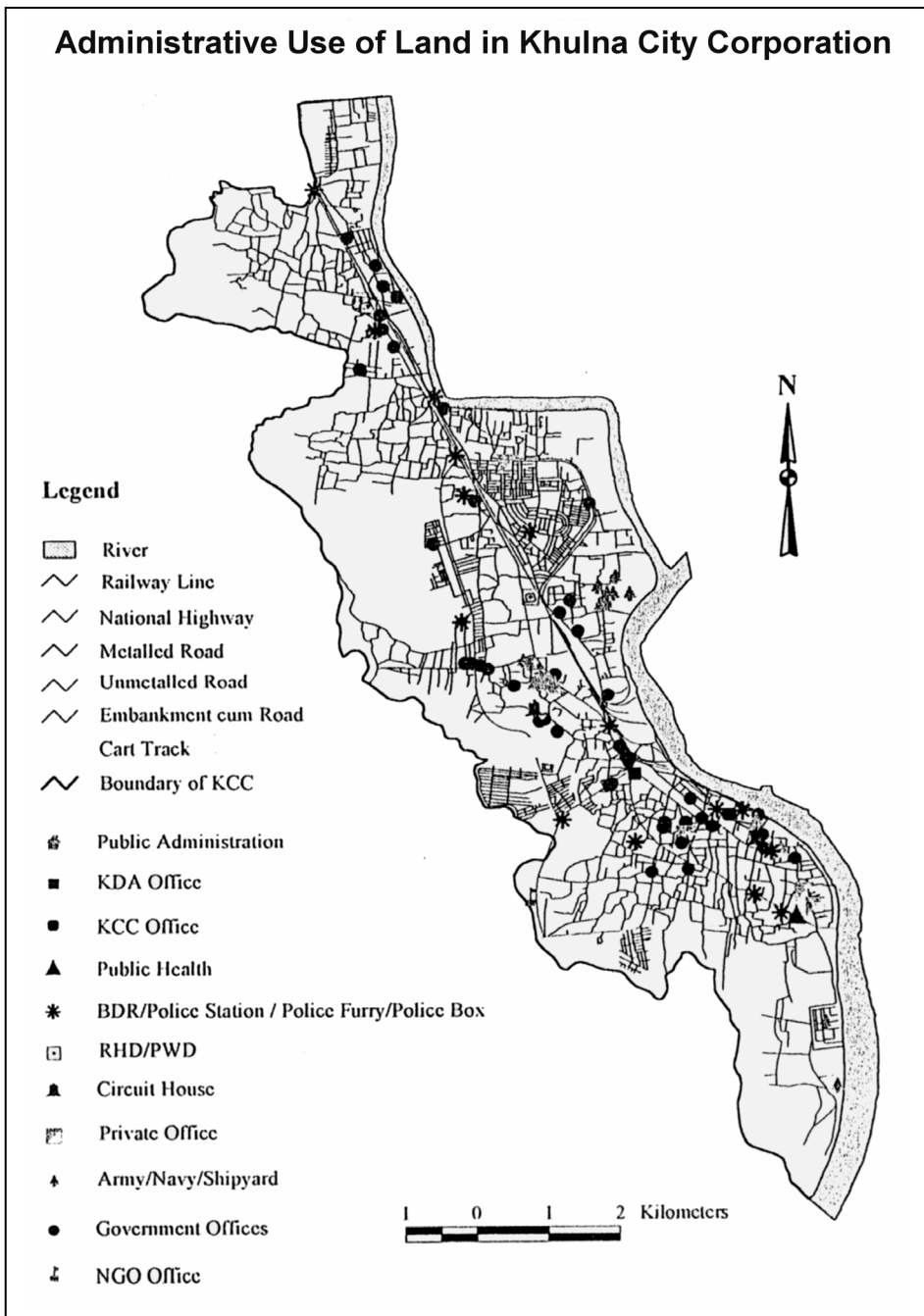


Fig. 3. Administrative use of land in Khulna city corporation.

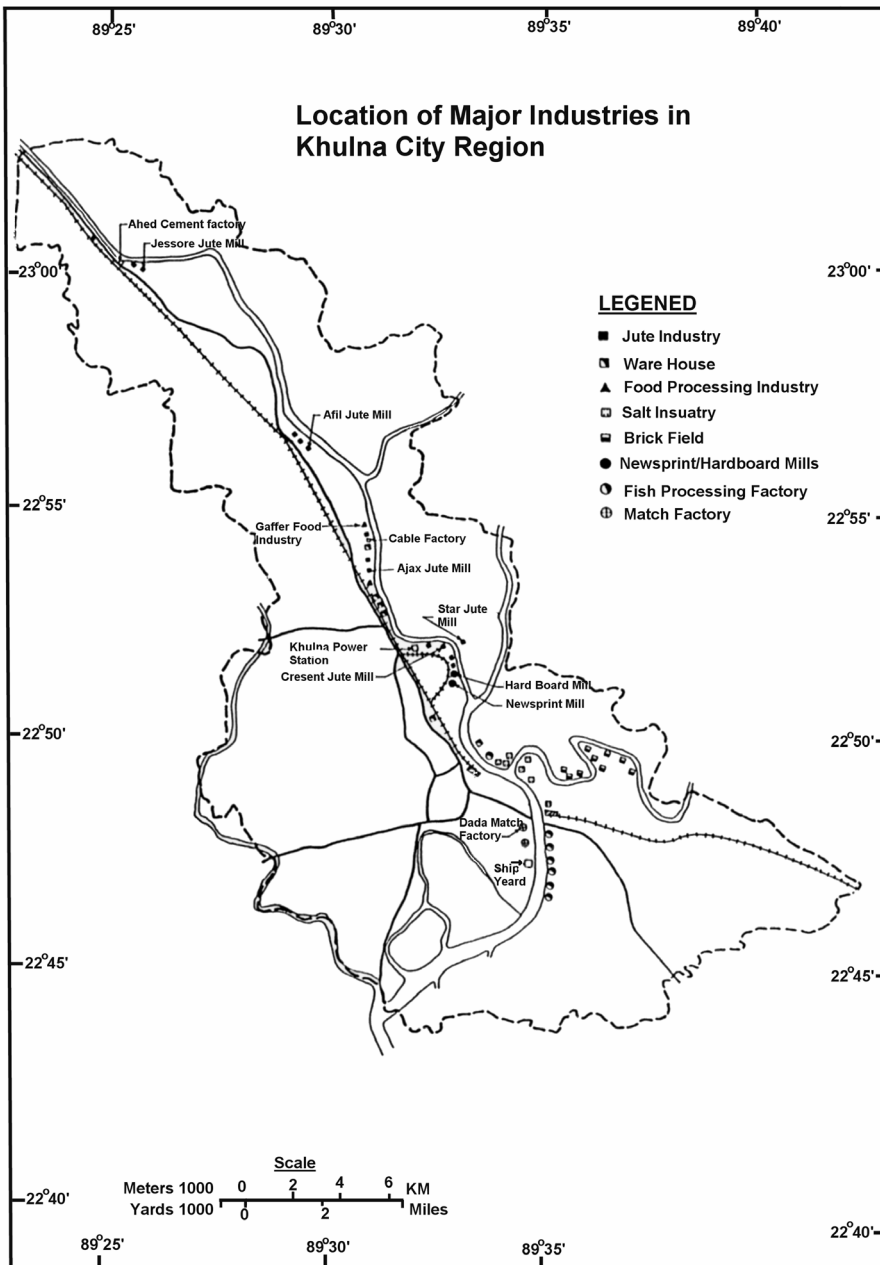


Fig. 4. Location of major industries in Khulna city region.

The rivalry between British indigo planter Mr. Rainy and local *Zaminder* Mr. Shibnath Ghose also influenced the growth and development of this town. Mr. Rainy, an English indigo trader, had his indigo center at Nikalpur of Khulna. He had vast amount of landed property and he was often cruel to his peasants and local people. Mr. Rainy and Shibnath Ghose fought many bloody battles and their rivalry was well known to all. The British rulers set up one administrative unit in Khulna to pacify and ameliorate the rivalry between Mr. Rainy and Mr. Ghose (Mitra, 1963). In 1842, Khulna was made the headquarters of subdivision. One of its main objectives, according to Sir James Westland, was "to hold and check Mr. Rainy, who purchased a zamindari in the vicinity and resided at Nikalpur, and who did not seem to acknowledge the restraints of law".

During 1875-76, the then British Government crucially felt the importance of the *Sundarbans*. Mr. Richard Temple, the Governor of Bengal, thoroughly surveyed and examined the condition of this mangrove forest from the distant district of *24 Pargana* and Jessore. It was also previously thought by the British Government to set up a district comprising the vast areas of the *Sundarbans* for ease of administration and revenue collection. At the same time, decision was taken by the British Government to connect the southern part of Bengal with other areas of the country through rail communication, and consequently, rail line construction work started. The then British Government set up a separate district Khulna, comprising of the subdivision of Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira on the 25th April of 1882. Khulna town was made the headquarters of the newly established district. Construction work for the new district headquarters started in the same year, and Mr. W.M. Clay was appointed as the first district magistrate.

In British Period, the main overseas trade links of East-Bengal were through Calcutta city. After the partition of India in 1947, major communication links of East-Bengal (which became East Pakistan) with Calcutta was cut off, and this region became commercially and economically isolated. East Bengal was also the main jute producing area of India, but the jute industries were mainly located in Calcutta. As a result of this, the then Pakistan Government felt the urgent need for setting up jute industries. With the assistance of a favorable government industrial policy, a number of jute mills were developed in Khulna within a short period of time (Hasan, 1998). With the closure of trade links with Calcutta Port, there arose the need for setting up a seaport in this region. As discussed earlier, a seaport was set up at Chalna (which is 20 miles away from Khulna city), which was subsequently moved to a nearby site *Mongla*. The setting up of *Mongla* Port increased the importance of Khulna city to a great extent (Saroar *et al.*, 1998).

After the partition of India, many Muslim refugees started migrating to East Pakistan and many of them were from Calcutta. The refugees from Calcutta were given shelter in Khulna city, because of its nearness to Calcutta. To rehabilitate these refugees, housing schemes were undertaken by the Government. Moreover, the refugees from Calcutta were politically, economically, and socially influential, and they played a dominant role in the development of the city. After the liberation war of 1971, Bangladesh became an independent nation, and the importance of Khulna city grew rapidly as the second port city of the country. The municipal boundary of the city was extended, and new roads, buildings, housing areas and industrial estates were developed. Khulna emerged as the most important industrial township for the southwestern region of Bangladesh. After the independence of Bangladesh, started the mass migration of people from the rural to urban areas. Due to migration as well as natural growth, the population of Khulna city grew rapidly, and consequently economic and commercial activities increased manifold

(Saroar *et al.*, 1998).

In Bangladesh Period, the capacity of *Mongla* Port was expanded and its communication links with Khulna city was strengthened by construction of a metalled road. Gradually *Mongla* Port became the main seaport for exportable bulk commodities from Bangladesh. The development and expansion of *Mongla* Port influenced the development of Khulna city. In the recent past, greater Khulna district became a vast region for shrimp and prawn cultivation. Vast areas of Satkhira, Bagerhat, and Khulna were used for cultivation of shrimps, prawns and other saline water fish. As a result, many shrimp and frozen food processing factories developed in Khulna, and the city became the number one trading center for sea-fish in Bangladesh. The development of different educational institutions such as Khulna BIT (Bangladesh Institute of Technology), Khulna Medical College and Khulna University also increased the importance of Khulna city to a great extent.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Khulna is now the third largest metropolis of Bangladesh and presently it has a population of about 1.3 million. The first Master Plan for the city was prepared in 1961, covering an area of 70 square miles. A new structure plan, master plan and a detailed area plan for the city is under preparation by Aqua-Sheltech Consortium on behalf of Khulna Development Authority (KDA). The proposed Khulna Master Plan Area (KMPA) encompasses a landmass of 420 square kilometers, which is a conurbation of three townships around the Khulna city Corporation, including surrounding urban and rural areas (Structure Plan for Khulna, 1998).

Khulna city has followed a ribbon development due to limitations of physical expansion on all directions. It has taken an elongated shape and most of the development activities are concentrated on the left bank of the *Rupsha* River. Developments on the other side of the river are haphazard and these are basically occupied by different industries like brick-fields, ice mill, fish processing industry, slums and squatter settlements. The city has the problem of unplanned land use and illegal construction, scarcity of appropriate land for housing, water logging, want of electricity and fuel, lack of recreation facilities and high rate of crime. Khulna has however some scope for future growth and development due to some of its inherent potentials like favorable transportation network, recent development in specialized institutions, establishment of industrial areas, export processing zone adjacent to *Mongla* Sea Port, and attraction for tourism due to historical sites and the mangrove forest of the *Sundarbans*. The paper has the following recommendations for a coordinated and planned development of Khulna city in the new millennium.

Recommendations

Though Khulna is an industrial town, lack of skills and literacy acts as a barrier for the lower income group to be involved in the formal sector of the city. Accommodation of the informal sector activities with the formal sector is an important consideration, and this could be done through different planning interventions. Despite the existence of *Mongla* Port, the absence of a bridge over the *Rupsha* River and lack of any international airport are two impediments of Khulna's growth. Improvements in the law and order situation, and the provision of regular power supply are major preconditions for its future growth. Moreover, to make this city attractive for international investment, there is the need for developing adequate civic amenities in the city. Khulna city can be easily developed into a focal point for tourism. It can be developed both as a center for cultural tourism (based on different historical and cultural sites of the region) and eco-tourism (based on the

Sundarbans mangrove forest). Local and foreign tourists are now using Khulna city as a transit point to visit the *Sundarbans* and other adjacent tourist sites. To attract tourists, the quality of the environments of the city should be improved and standard hotels, motels and rest houses must be developed.

Infrastructure investment and expansion of trade and commerce are crucial for growth of this city. By connecting the *Mongla* Port directly with the city by direct rail and highway (through the proposed *Rupsha* Bridge), cargo movement between *Mongla* and Nepal can be facilitated. Simultaneously, a direct rail link with Calcutta can invigorate trade and commerce in Khulna. Gas pipeline connection and upgraded telecommunication and Information Technology (IT) facilities are also essential for development of the city. Present shrimp and salt industries of Khulna can be expanded and new industries such as garments, cement, and computers can be promoted. A technology park can be developed in the city on the basis of available human resources and logistics of Khulna University and Bangladesh Institute of Technology (BIT). An integrated development strategy would be very effective for this city region. Developing a modern airport and connecting Khulna with different surrounding locations by expressway would be helpful in this connection. Simultaneously with the first *Rupsha* Bridge, the city would need a few more bridges over the *Vairab-Rupsha* River to integrate development on its two parts.

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